

update

Governor's Advisory Council on Aging



SPRING 2001

A Message From the Chair

At their year-end retreat, the Governor's Advisory Council on Aging set goals for this year and the future. Both our vision and mission statements focus on **advocacy**. That advocacy was visible when the Council hosted Senior Action Day at the Capitol on March 1. This event provided an opportunity for legislators, seniors and service providers to meet and talk.



*Dorothy Staskey,
Council Chair
Flagstaff, AZ*

The Governor's Council has been a strong advocate to increase the support for Home and Community Based Services. Other areas in which the Council has an interest are assistance with prescription drugs, support for Alzheimer's research, the Grandparents

Raising Grandchildren initiative, and the responsibilities of referral agencies.

This year our proactive Council established the Older Workers Task Force to explore the opportunities this labor pool represents. The Council is expanding Grandparents Raising Grandchildren support activities. We are reviewing the possibility of assisting with the Lifetime University Program in response to the question of how can the aging process become a part of the education system statewide.

We are planning for the next Governor's Conference on Aging and will continue collaborating and networking with other state agencies to assure that the senior population is included in service plans now and in the future. We offer our expertise, knowledge and leadership capabilities to help others.

Senior Action Day 2001

Senior Action Day was held March 1 at Wesley Bolin Plaza, across from the Capitol. The day was a success with 1200 people attending from across the state. The weather cooperated and a beautiful, sunny day was filled with information, exchanges of ideas, and entertainment.

The legislators walked over and had lunch with their constituents. They listened to the ideas and concerns of seniors from their districts. More than half of the

lawmakers from both the House and Senate attended. 29 out of 30 districts were represented by at least one member of the Legislature. Everyone enjoyed the chance to talk in an informal atmosphere.

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Participants share concerns and ideas with one of the many legislators who attended Senior Action Day 2001 in Phoenix.

Grandparent Concerns Task Force

The Governor's Council on Aging Grandparent Concerns Task Force has been instrumental in ensuring that grandparents are receiving much needed information and support to make the challenges of caring for their grandchildren productive and successful. The Task Force members are increasing public awareness of the difficulties surrounding the grandparenting issue. They approached this responsibility with several methods.

In 2000, several of the Task Force projects were successful. Among these was creation of a bookmark that will be distributed throughout the state. It contains agency names and phone numbers of the Task Force members. The Council co-sponsored *The Second Annual Grandparent University* with the Beatitudes Center D.O.A.R. in November 2000. This event had 75 participants and childcare was provided to 35 grandchildren.

The Council supported **HB 1290** (Kinship Care; foster

care program), which Governor Hull signed last summer. The bill mandates a two-year pilot program in two Arizona counties. The Kinship Care program is providing additional services for grandparents who are caring for grandchildren in the foster care system.

In this session, the council supported **HB 2424**, now **HB 2208** (TANF; foster care), sponsored by Representative Leah Landrum, that will increase TANF payments if the kinship caregiver is a grandparent. The amended bill had been sent back to the house for concurrence. Another bill, **HB 2219** (Grandparents Visitation; burden of proof), would have denied visitation rights to grandparents unless the parents were proven unfit. This bill would have been a setback in our efforts to assist grandparents. This burdensome bill was defeated through the efforts of The Task Force, which works to sensitize the community to the growing number of grandparents raising grandchildren.

Legislation Update on Prescription Drugs

The need for prescription medication assistance to elderly and disabled individuals has not abated; it has exacerbated. The debate in the Legislature originally included three good proposals:

SB 1110 by Sen. Andy Nichols, would have created a prescription drug subsidy program for Medicare beneficiaries with incomes up to 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL). It would also create prescription drug discount program for Medicare beneficiaries with incomes up to 175% FPL who reside in areas without HMO coverage. The proposal was conditional on an AHCCCS waiver from the Health Care Finance Administration (HCFA). If approved, the waiver would have minimized the cost to the state by bringing in federal match dollars. The fiscal note for this bill was estimated at under \$10 million over a two-year period.

Another proposal, **SB 1234** by Senators Chris Cummiskey and David Petersen, would have created two prescription medication assistance programs under AHCCCS. The first expanded Medicaid prescription medication coverage to Medicare beneficiaries with incomes at or below 250% FPL, who reside in a county without a Medicare HMO or who had exhausted their HMO prescription drug benefits. It included monthly premiums and a co-

payment for each prescription. The program would repeal if the federal government enacts prescription medication coverage legislation equivalent to or greater than coverage under this program.

The second would have set up a statewide prescription medication purchasing program for individuals eligible for Medicare due to a disability, or who are at least 60 years old. This program would provide access to prescription medications at the lowest market rate through pharmaceutical benefits management (PBM) companies.

This proposal included funding for outreach and education efforts regarding prescription medication assistance programs. The fiscal note was nearly \$30 million for the next two-year budget.

HB 2607 (Now **SB 1118**,) by Representative Debra Gullet, establishes a two-year pilot program under AHCCCS for limited prescription medication subsidies. The pilot will cover Medicare beneficiaries with incomes between 100% and 200% of federal poverty level (FPL); residents of an Arizona county without a Medicare HMO, or of a county with an HMO that does not provide prescription drug benefits. The program covers 50% of the cost of the medications

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Recent Changes in Medicare

The Benefits Improvement and Protections Act of 2000 was signed on December 21, 2000. It provides many improvements for Medicare, Medicaid, and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Following are some of the changes affecting Medicare beneficiaries.

- Beginning January 1, 2002, Medicare would cover annual glaucoma screenings for persons determined to be at high risk for glaucoma, individuals with a family history of glaucoma, and individuals with diabetes.
- Beginning July 1, 2001, Medicare would cover screening colonoscopies for all individuals. One screening colonoscopy every ten years, or one flexible sigmoidoscopy every four years, would be covered.
- Beginning January 1, 2002, Medicare would cover medical nutrition therapy services for beneficiaries who have diabetes or a renal disease.
- Effective December 21, 2000 there is no time limitation on the coverage of immunosuppressive

drugs for beneficiaries who have received a Medicare-covered organ transplant.

- Beginning July 1, 2001, the 24-month waiting period required for an individual to establish Medicare eligibility on the basis of a disability would be waived for persons medically determined to have amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).
- The moratorium on the physical therapy and occupational therapy caps has been extended for one year, through 2002.
- Individuals with End Stage Renal Disease who were on a Medicare +Choice plan, and lost their coverage due to termination of Medicare contract or service area reduction on or after December 31, 1998, are permitted to enroll in another Medicare +Choice Plan.
- Beginning June 1, 2001, individuals who enroll in a Medicare +Choice Plan after the 10th day of the month will be covered beginning the first day of the next calendar month.

Prescription Drugs *continued from page 2*

in excess of a \$1,000 deductible each calendar year. The deductible is lowered to \$500 for incomes between 100 and 149% of FPL. In the second fiscal year, AHCCCS will have authority to lower the deductible requirements up to \$300 if less than 75% of the appropriation from the previous year has not been spent. SB 1118 is the only bill still active at this writing.

Advocates in the aging network were convinced that a combination of all three proposals could work well together. Given the exodus of Medicare HMO's from

rural areas of the state, prescription medication assistance is a dire need. A last-minute effort to memorialize Sen. Andy Nichols, a health care advocate who died suddenly in mid-April, by passing **HB 2424** as a combined package was defeated in the House. Unfortunately the only prescription bill still moving, **SB 1118**, is not deemed to be a comprehensive enough package. The Legislature will undoubtedly continue to receive calls for help from seniors throughout the State who are doing without their prescription medications in order to meet other basic needs.

Senior Action Day *continued from page 1*

The Governor welcomed the crowd and talked about the aging issues. Former Rep. Art Hamilton gave an enthusiastic address explaining the importance of senior advocacy. Key representatives of the aging network were intro-



The crowd enjoys a free scoop of Mary Coyle ice cream.

duced and spoke about how seniors *can* make a difference.

There were over 45 displays of programs, services, information, and agencies devoted to seniors and the aging community. Dancers and singers from around the state kept the crowd entertained. A variety of food vendors were on hand and free ice cream was served.

The Council and staff appreciate the support of the sponsors, and efforts of all those involved in making the event such a success.

Older Americans Month

MAY 2001

Tips to Improve Your Memory!

Acronyms are made up of the first letter of each word in a series of words. For example, *USA* stands for *United States of America*.



Acronyms are easy to use and really help. A quick way to remember the names of the Great Lakes? *HOMES!* Make up your own acronym for a list or group of words. Who knows, you might invent a new word. Start using this technique ASAP!

Governor's Advisory Council on Aging

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